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ABSTRACT

A policy decision taken at Michigan State's College of Education profoundly changed the nature and orientation of the elementary social studies methods courses taught. It was decided that the college would move from a relatively monolithic program to offering incoming students a choice of alternate programmatic routes to certification. Specifically, within a two-year span of time four different programs were offered as alternatives to the traditional program. The thematic alternative programs were entitled: (1) "Learning Community"; (2) "Academic Learning"; (3) "Multiple Perspectives"; and (4) "Teaching in Heterogeneous Classrooms." All of the new programs retained an elementary social studies methods course within their curricular design. This paper examines the issues raised when a social studies methods course must be reconciled in premise and practice with a thematic teacher training program which is designed to be longitudinally consistent. Under special consideration are the unique premise, content, and organizational dimensions of the "Learning Community" and "Multiple Perspectives" teacher training programs. Descriptions are presented of the content and design of these two programs, the course of which key questions about these teacher training alternatives are discussed. (JD)

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Program Evaluation Series No. 6

COURSE DESIGN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A THEMATIC TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY

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Department of Teacher Education
and
Office of Program Evaluation

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Timothy H. Little

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally at Michigan State University instructors have been permitted a large measure of discretion in the design and implementation of social studies methods courses. To be sure, there are rough guidelines for course content mutually agreed upon by faculty and provided by university catalog descriptions. On balance, however, the frame of reference of the individual section instructors has determined the ultimate intellectual "tilt" of the courses.

Late in the 1970's a policy decision was taken at Michigan State's College of Education which was to profoundly change the nature and orientation of the elementary social studies methods courses taught. Over the years MSU has maintained one of the largest teacher preparation programs extant. In 1979 it was decided that the College would move from a relatively monolithic program to the experiment of offering incoming students a choice of alternate programmatic routes to certification. Specifically, within a two year span of time four (4) quite different programs "came on line" as alternatives to the traditional program which was continued but downscaled. The thematic alternative programs were entitled: (1) "Academic Learning", (2) "Learning Community", (3) "Multiple Perspectives", and (4) "Teaching in Heterogeneous Classrooms".

All of the new programs retained an elementary social studies methods course within their curricular design in one form or another. The necessity of developing appropriate social studies courses for these new programs served as a timely and welcome catalyst to fresh thinking about the nature and purposes of such offerings. However, the fact that each program was organized intellectually around a different theme posed a number of major and complex dilemmas for the social studies educators charged with creating and teaching said courses. The author of this paper was invited to create and to teach social studies methods courses in two of the new programs. This paper is dedicated to an introspective analysis of the problems and payoffs entailed in these endeavors.

Foremost among the dilemmas created was that of intellectual cross-pressures upon the instructor. On one hand, the instructor came to the new programs with a clear set of "intellectual baggage". To wit, after some seven years of classroom teaching and thirteen years as a social studies methods professor, the instructor had a relatively clear-cut personal conception as to what ought to be included in a comprehensive elementary social studies methods course. This view was grounded in a frame of reference which clearly had the discipline of social studies at its core.

On the other hand, each of the alternative programs specified that courses that were to be part of its curriculum ought to be congruent with its carefully and collectively developed thematic frame of reference. For example, the social studies methods course within the Learning Community Program was, and rightly so, under considerable pressure to conform in premises, content, and methodology to the intellectual orthodoxies of the host program.

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

Given the above, it is the purpose of this paper to examine:

- the issues raised when a social studies methods course must be reconciled in premise and practice with a thematic teacher training program which is designed to be longitudinally consistent.

- the rather unique premise, content, and organizational syntheses which emerged as two new social studies methods courses were developed as integral dimensions of the Learning Community and Multiple Perspectives teacher training programs respectively.

DATA SOURCES

Inasmuch as the paper is a case study, the primary data sources are of three types. First, the formal course development documentation which was submitted to the various university review committees by the author has been retrieved. The second major source of information consists of the teaching syllabi and daily teaching notes which were developed and used to present the courses. Thirdly, the author kept running notes as the courses were developed. These later data were particularly useful in identifying the tension points that emerged as efforts were made to reconcile programmatic goals with those commonly identified within the social studies.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PAPER

This paper marks the first and descriptive stage of an effort to study longitudinally the evolution and impact of new conceptual systems for ordering social studies methods instruction. The paper will document and explore the cross-pressures encountered when a traditional subject field methodology course must be reconciled with innovative programs that do not assume the old constants of teacher education. More importantly, alternative models for ordering social studies methods instruction have emerged as a result of the reconceptualization required by the new program development efforts.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

Although each of the alternative programs, by definition, represents a unique frame of reference, both the certification code of the state of Michigan and common sense dictate that they share certain characteristics. Therefore, within each of the programs may be found attention to:

> "a. How human beings grow and how they learn.
> b. The structure, function and purposes of educational institutions in our society.
> c. The methods and materials of instruction appropriate to the elementary or secondary level." (Michigan State Teacher Certification Code- Am 1973)

Beyond state requirements, the programs were also developed within certain College of Education guidelines. Therefore, they also share the traits of being:

> ". . . 1. conceptually organized to respond to enduring problems that professionals encounter in their work;
>
> 2. firmly grounded in research; and
>
> 3. carefully designed to incorporate the collective wisdom of teacher educators in bridging the gap between theory and practice."
> (MSU-Studies in Professional Education. . ., 1983.)

The original and traditional undergraduate teacher education sequence at Michigan State University meets the above requirements with a program of studies which is conceptually framed around the traditional subject matter disciplines. To wit:

> "Students selecting this approach to elementary teacher certification will take course work which provides them with selected knowledge from the fields of educational psychology, history, sociology and philosophy of education."
> (MSU-Studies in Professional Education. . ., 1983.)

In a somewhat parallel fashion, the traditional elementary social studies methods course, as taught by the author, was thematically and topically organized around the content and methods associated with the various social science disciplines.

Against this background, the author was charged with the specific creation and teaching of social studies methods courses for the two program alternatives entitled respectively "Learning Community" and "Multiple Perspectives". Program development meetings were held by the core staff of each program over a period of more than a year. In both programs an early decision was taken that the social studies methods course, as well as other courses within the programs, would be tailored to, and consistent with the conceptual framework of the respective host programs.

The Learning Community Program

Descriptive material pertaining to the Learning Community Program abounds. For the purpose of this paper, however, the following excerpt from the MSU College of Education program description should suffice to capture the general thrust and flavor of this teacher training alternative.

"The Learning Community Program prepares teachers to teach school subjects effectively while focusing upon the concomitant need to promote personal and social responsibility among students. As changes have occurred in other social institutions. . ., schools have had to assume increased responsibility for developing qualities needed by citizens in a complex democratic nation . . . (C)itizens must acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for taking independent action in the world. They must also learn to recognize the social consequences of that action which, to be maximally effective, requires cooperative as well as individual initiation . . .

"Students in the Learning Community Program learn to create a sense of community in classrooms and schools...Students in this program become aware of the many related communities of home, neighborhood, school, and the teaching professional; and the interactive impact these communities may have on classrooms and teaching." (MSU-Studies in Professional Education...,1983.)

The Multiple Perspectives Program

As was the case above, a terse summary of the Multiple Perspectives Program's thematic base was printed in the MSU College of Education program description. Excerpts from that document follow.

"...Teachers are decision makers who must balance . . .competing demands on the school . . .The emphasis in this program centers upon teacher decision making. Attention is given to decisions regarding instructional design, instruction, individual differences, and group development. This program enables the student to comprehend the forces that impinge on decisions, to make the difficult decisions that must be made daily in the classrooms, and to understand the consequences of those decisions...." (MSU-Studies in Professional Education...,1983.)

ISSUES RAISED FOR SOCIAL STUDIES METHODS COURSE DESIGN BY THE TARGETED ALTERNATIVE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The author's task was to conceptualize, write, gain university approval for, and teach variants of a social studies methods course appropriate to, and consistent with, the two target alternative programs. (In the case of one of the courses, this development work was done in collaboration with Dr. Roy Wesselman of the MSU College of Education.) The opportunity was an exciting one; creating such courses and presenting them to non-social studies bodies for judgement and acceptance proved to be powerful catalysts and stimulants to new thinking. As the development process went forward, however, it became clear that a number of powerful cross-pressures were at work which seriously complicated the task for a social studies trained and normed instructor. These cross-pressures fell into two broad categories; (1) public school generated pressures and (2) programmatic cross-pressures.

Public School Pressures

Both the Learning Community and Multiple Perspectives Programs feature extensive school classroom field placement as a major dimension of their training; five consecutive terms in the case of the former and six in the case of the latter program. (MSU-Studies in Professional Education..., 1983.) An important aspect of said field work requires that students demonstrate the ability to model the teaching skills presented in the respective programs. The public school classroom experiences of program enrollees, therefore, may be expected to exercise an even greater influence on them than that which has been reported in more traditional and limited student teaching placements.

Design of the one term social studies methods course variants, therefore, called for the inclusion within the classes of assignments which would require students to present in the cooperating schools both the content and processes learned. This requirement theoretically posed a major dilemma.

Potentially conflicting conceptions of social studies. Clearly each of the cooperating elementary schools possesses an in-place, functioning social studies curriculum which pre-dates work with the alternative teacher training programs. In the case of neither alternative programs was there a natural congruence with the established

building social studies curriculum. Similarly, there was no obvious affinity between the in-place school social studies models and the social studies methods course variants themselves.

Resolution. Fortunately, the "conflicting conceptions" problem proved to be solvable. Early meetings and/or communication with the public school teaching staffs within the host buildings prior to the finalization of the methods course design led to an acceptable level of accomodation. Compromises were reached on topics and processes to be taught and practiced which led to a high degree of ultimate fit between methods course content and the extant school social studies curricula.

It should be noted, however, that despite the fact that a working accomodation was reached, the nature of the social studies methods courses ultimately delivered to undergraduates was significantly influenced by the cooperating schools. The degree to which it is desirable that the field dimension of the alternative programs should shape the social studies methods courses seems certainly arguable.

PROGRAMMATIC CROSS-PRESSURES

If the field related pressures were resolved with relative ease, those posed by the alternative program structure itself proved to be more testy. Essentially they were three in number.

Social studies as an intellectual subset. One of the original arguments posited for the development of the alternative programs at MSU was the perception that the then standard program lacked longitudinal consistency. That is, each of the courses that comprised the overall program of study existed in a separate intellectual vacuum tied to the frame of reference of the academic discipline from which it was drawn rather than to any overarching theme which would bind all of the courses together. The description of the two alternative programs cited above reveals that longitudinal consistency of courses around a theme was a high priority in their development and implementation. This new consistency was all to the good. Charged with developing the social studies methods courses for these programs, however, the author struggled with the other side of the coin. Given a discrete and binding set of training and philosophic premises associated with the two programs, the range of choices for the design of the social studies courses was noticeably circumscribed. The social studies methods courses were required to assume the status of intellectual subsets of larger program themes.

The problem of intellectual orthodoxy. A related and somewhat derivative cross-pressure emerged once the social studies courses were designed and offered. The problem manifested itself in a number of ways. A major symptom of the cross-pressure revolved around language. As the author taught in the two target programs, it is clear that each had developed a set of program specific terminology which, carefully reinforced and amplified in succeeding courses, tended to become the delimited frame of reference of the students. That is, there appeared to be a consistent tendency on the part of students to attempt to translate new materials and ideas presented into their existing weltanschauung. Such translation was not always entirely successful. This cross-pressure also revealed itself in the matter of evaluation. Reflecting the fact that the programs were designed to offer longitudinal consistency, there was subtle but mild pressure to use existing programmatic field observation forms and categories of evaluation.

Program staffing patterns. One of the great strengths of the new programs lies in the degree to which the extensive field work required of students cited earlier is supervised. Central to the quality of this supervision is the fact that the same university field staffer frequently has the opportunity to observe and shape the development of students over several terms. Given this, the influence of such field supervisors on program enrollees tends to be great. Add to the above the fact that the field dimensions of the programs, understandably, tend to place a high premium upon the teaching of general teaching processes and thematic material that reflects the particular program rather than subject matter specific material. It is clear that this amalgam exercises a powerful and enduring influence upon the way in which the teacher education candidates view the act of teaching. Contrast this with the fact that the elementary social studies methods courses in both of the target programs are but one term in duration. Small wonder that the students come to these courses with a frame of reference about teaching which is solidly grounded; but not necessarily in ways which are complementary to the social studies as a subject.

Resolution. Clearly the problems of programmatic cross-pressures cited above were major. On the one hand, the existence of the alternative programs were givens; the author had agreed to attempt to develop the social studies courses within the thematic and definitional confines posited. Furthermore, the author is firmly in support of the extensive field component of the programs with their emphasis upon constant and long-term field supervision by program staffers whose orientation lies with the program construct and not the subject of social studies.

At the same time, the author's background and beliefs about the social studies built up both as classroom teacher and methods professor argued against an "intellectual surrender" in the matter of creating and ordering the social studies courses. In search of a means to resolving the potential conflicts cited above, the author turned to the social studies literature. Would it be possible to derive discrete ways of viewing the social studies endeavor that would be rough intellectual analogs of the alternative program themes and which would yet be "true" to constructs within the social studies tradition? This quest ultimately turned Hegelian and the syntheses which resulted proved to be both intellectually stimulating and developmentally profitable. The outcomes of these endeavors became the social studies methods courses for the target alternative programs and are described below.

METHODS COURSE DESIGN: THE SYNTHESIS PROCESS

The author surveyed recent social studies literature for intellectual models which might be appropriate to extrapolation into the design and/or execution of the two new methods courses. Much useful thought was unearthed. It should be added, however, by way of disclaimer that although several social studies cognoscenti are cited in the following section, responsibility for the interpretations and/or misinterpretations of their work rest solely with the author of this article.

While each of the courses, as developed, was tailored in design to complement the alternative program with which it was affiliated, certain basic social studies methodological skills and topics were treated as constants and retained in both courses. An examination of the syllabi for the Learning Community and the Multiple Perspectives courses, therefore, would reveal that both courses retain a treatment of such themes as "the contributions of the various social science disciplines to the social studies", and "techniques for formulating social studies objectives".

The Learning Community Program:
Methods of Teaching Social Studies

Expressed in Joycian terms (Joyce, 1971), a review of the Learning Community precepts cited earlier argues that the social studies methods course developed for this program would require something which placed rather more stress upon the personal and social dimensions of the social studies than was evident in the "standard" methods course. A review of the journal Theory and Research in Social Education , hereafter referred to as TRSE has led the author to focus attention upon the thinking of numerous authors published in that quarterly.

In an article published midway through the author's efforts to construct the Learning Community social studies variant, Oliner (1983) cites the historic significance of citizenship education to the social studies but argues persuasively that a common failing of current efforts in this area lies in the fact that such education all too often focuses almost exclusively upon the fact that " . . . the central relationship of individuals as citizens of the nation state is to their government" (Oliner, 1983, p.66). Oliner further asserts that the United States currently suffers from the many social ills associated with a breakdown of a sense of community among its citizens and that citizenship education efforts ought to be vectored in the direction of systematically fostering and re-inforcing this social sense. A telling point in the Oliner argument holds that:

"...Unlike the state, the central relationship in a community is the one that exists among its members-that is, relationships with each other are a central factor to members of a community " (Oliner, 1983, p. 66).

A second source which proved most helpful in the development of the Learning Community methods course was that of Giroux and Penna in their Spring 1979 article in TRSE. In it they assert

"The social processes of most classrooms militate against students developing a sense of community. As in the larger societal order, competition and individual striving are at the core of American schooling" (Giroux and Penna, 1979, p. 34).

Mixing the above with some introspection, the author turned to the Law-Related Education tradition for possible means of structuring the course. On first examination, this would appear to be a strange choice. What seems more government oriented, more rigid, and reflective of a competitive frame of reference, than the Law? If one looks beyond the stereotype of the field, however, it becomes more appealing as an ordering framework. First, an examination of its various branches reveals that the Law clearly treats the reciprocal rights and obligations of human relationships at many levels. Secondly, studying society from a legal perspective provides students with:

"...a structural framework for the discussion of ethics...(Lee, Ellenwood, Little, 1973, p. 226).

Thirdly, inasmuch as the Law treats the matter of responsibility as well as personal rights, one can find in it the basis for a systematic consideration of "obligation", a key dimension in the development of a sense of "community".

Adaptation of a formal legal framework for an elementary methods course, however, seemed inappropriately restrictive. Therefore, as ultimately piloted, the course adopted the following topical areas from the legal framework, without limiting study of these topics to formal legal issues:

Relationships		Parallel Body of Law
1.	Citizen to citizen rights and obligations.	Civil Law
2.	Citizen/State rights and obligations.	Constitutional Law Criminal Law Administrative Law
3.	Citizen/Merchant rights and obligations.	Consumer Law
4.	Group to Group relationships.	Constitutional Law
5.	Citizen/World Relationships.	International Law

In addition to adopting the framework of the legal system as one of the major organizing devices for the course, many of the instructional techniques were borrowed from the Law-Related Education tradition as well; most notably the case method and mock trial techniques. It should be stressed, however, that when presenting materials within either of the two formats cited above, they most commonly were not offered up in the trappings of formal legal cases. Rather, cases often took the form of fairy tales; mock trials the form of group deliberated ethical dilemmas.

In sum, the methods course variant developed for the Learning Community Program has come to be framed in large part around the topics of reciprocal rights and responsibilities, formal and informal, found in a wide range of social relationships. Such an organizational schema clearly responds to the Oliner critique concerning an overemphasis upon government centered citizenship education. Similarly, the Giroux and Penna concern that classroom studies rarely focus upon the development of a sense of community is met as well. By focusing upon the extent and nature of reciprocal rights and obligations, the methods course will hopefully produce teachers who will frame their instruction in social studies around the development of a full sense of "Learning Community".

The Multiple Perspectives Program:
Methods of Teaching Social Studies

A terse review of the premises of the Multiple Perspectives project suggests that a social studies methods course which would be appropriately analagous to the central theme of the program would, of necessity, focus on decision-making. Design of a course which would meet this criterion, however, was complicated further by the existence of another generalized program design feature. Reflecting a programmatic emphasis upon the integration of subject matter learning, each of the methods courses designed for the Multiple Perspectives Program was required to have a discrete cross-disciplinary dimension. That is, integral to the social studies methods course design there would have to be attention to its teaching interface with science, mathematics, and language arts.

There is, of course, a long-standing and rich tradition of attention to "decision-making" and/or "problem solving" within the social studies literature. This author, however, had been fundamentally disquieted over the years by the way in which such topics had been commonly treated. To be sure, procedural models for decision-

making/problem-solving abound in the social studies and other disciplines. What has been missing from many of these models, however, has been systematic attention to the alternative means by which students might move from one stage of the models to the next. That is, by what procedures are students to move from an identification of alternatives stage to a selection stage; what intellectual processes will they be taught to bring to bear? Once again, a review of TRSE unearthed several articles which proved most helpful in addressing this concern and raising new ones prior to the final structuring of the Multiple Perspectives social studies course variant. Perhaps the single most influential article was that entitled "Reasoning as a Metaphor for Skill Development in the Social Studies Curriculum" (Hartoonian, 1980). He observed:

> "...while the quantities and qualities of discourse modes vary in different disciplines, the kinds of skills required to function adequately in all areas seem to be common in that they address reasoning abilities. In spite of this, specific attention to instruction in a comprehensive and coordinated set of skills which leads to reasoning is tangential at best to the social studies curriculum area (Hartoonian, 1980, p. 60).

In the same article Hartoonian goes on to argue that systematic reasoning skills need to be taught and includes a most remarkable "skill network" in which he describes in detail student competencies necessary to said reasoning (Hartoonian, 1980, p. 63).

Subsequent to the initial design of the Multiple Perspectives social studies methods course, this author was privileged to read a TRSE article by Hurst, Kinney, and Weiss entitled "The Decision-Making Process". This effort proved to have a most powerful influence upon the course as it was actually delivered to students in the Fall of 1984. Beyond offering a most comprehensive problem-solving model, the authors touched upon what proved to be a point missing from many treatments of decision-making: different kinds of decisions (Hurst, Kenney, Weiss, 1983, p. 28).

Barth and Shermis (1979) also proved to be most helpful in helping the author think about decision-making. They argued persuasively that a major failing of "problem-solving" as practiced in social studies lay in the fact that such efforts frequently ignored the "front end" of the process. That is, too often students play no role whatsoever in the definition of the problems to be solved. Presented with a pre-defined problem/decision students must reach closure on a dilemma whose very characterization may be at variance with how students might choose to view it. Would it not be far better, argued Barth and Shermis, if students were trained to systematically define problems/decisions themselves?

Given the above, the author set about the creation of the Multiple Perspectives social studies methods course. To be sure, the social studies literature provided an extensive basis for designing the course around decision-making. But the arguments and concerns of the authors cited suggested that this, in and of itself, would not be sufficient. What seemed called for was a melding of a decision-making focus with something else. At the risk of coining a phrase, the author came to call that something else "knowledge verification systems". In addition to orienting the teachers in training toward decision-making, the author determined to build into the course a dimension which focused upon alternate models of arriving at conclusions including such modes as the intuitive "hunch", reliance upon authority, and inductive/deductive logic. In addition, the author attempted to build in some consideration of the question of how one might determine when the use of one system is to be preferred over another.

In light of the above, and given the fact that program imperatives required that the course be cross-disciplinary to some degree, the following topical structure was embedded within the larger outline of the course:

Introduction to Knowledge Verification Systems

-Knowledge Verification Systems I:
The Social Scientific Method in the Social Studies
Focus: Sociology, Economics, Psychology and Political Science.

-Knowledge Verification Systems II:
Classical Reasoning and the Social Studies
Focus: History, Law, and the Humanities.

-Decision-Making Models in the Social Studies

-The Special Problem of Knowledge Verification and Values.
Choosing a Knowledge Verification System for a Given Task.

-Designing Cross-Disciplinary Units that Employ Knowledge Verification and Decision-Making Techniques.

-The Role of Microcomputers in the Knowledge Verification Process.

The outline described above represents an attempt to create a teachable social studies methods unit which will equip teachers, at least minimally, with some of the skills earlier cited as lacking by Hartoonian. His "Skills Network" has proven to be a most useful construct and provides the "blueprint" for several of the sessions. In its most recent version, the course has been significantly affected by the Hurst, Kinney, and Weiss article in two ways. First, their comprehensive decision-making model is presented to the teachers in training as part of the Knowledge Verification unit. Secondly, their concern for matching decisions to be made with the appropriate knowledge verification system is reflected in the outline as well. (Choosing a Knowledge Verification System for a Given Task) Finally, the Barth and Shermis critique of decision-making exercises as denying students the opportunity to define the problems to be solved is addressed in the outline as well. Embedded within the "Decision-Making Model" sessions is a treatment of the need to teach students how to frame questions to be examined as well as to solve questions served up by the text or teacher.

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

This paper describes the development efforts which have taken place in the creation of two new thematic social studies methods courses. By Fall 1985 both courses will have been taught twice and it will be possible to report on the impact studies which are being planned for each. Preliminary meetings have been held to discuss the design of these studies and it would appear that they will take the form of observations of, and structured interviews with, the teachers in training. Prior to finalization of the study design, however, several key questions about the courses have surfaced:

1. Will it be possible for an observer to identify a classroom social studies teacher by behavior as a graduate of either the Learning Community or the Multiple Perspectives Program?

2. Do the intellectual constructs which underpin the two courses call for a body of relevant content knowledge that is readily learnable by teachers in training?

3. What demonstrable impact will teachers trained in these two courses have upon the elementary youngsters in their classrooms?

It would be premature to close this essay with prescriptions and exhortations that others adopt and/or adapt either of the two models described above. The jury is clearly still out and will remain so for a time as to the efficacy of ordering social studies around either or both of the programmatic themes described in this paper. Indeed, it is the intention of the author to "read out the verdict" on the experiment at some future date. It can be reported, however, that the experience of developing and teaching the courses in question has been a bracing one. For that opportunity, the author owes a major debt of gratitude to colleagues both at Michigan State University's College of Education and within the social studies field at large.

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